

The religion of nature: Evangelical perspectives on the environment

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Abstract: The religion of nature: Evangelical perspectives on the environment

In this paper we examine recent developments in Evangelical movements among the Inuit of the Canadian Eastern Arctic. We focus especially on Canada Awakening Ministries (CAM) and show how it successfully integrates traditional Inuit ideas and values in a modern Christian perspective. We explore how elders are given a more prominent role in the "healing the land" rituals and how traditional elements are becoming part of a Christian context. We examine CAM's critical views on radical environmentalist groups and argue that its support of traditional Inuit hunting values through "biblical environmentalism" is bound to strengthen its position in the North.

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Introduction

Evangelism has become a strong force in the Canadian Eastern Arctic (Dorais 1997, 2001; Laugrand and Oosten 2007a, 2009; Stuckenberg 2005). In the last few decades, the new churches have started to attract more followers and built extensive networks in the area. They have been well aware of the importance of good communications, and have paid particular attention to development of accessible Evangelical websites. The new movements have expanded through Bible conferences and other religious meetings that spur development of local and regional networks. In the Arctic, powerful families and leaders have acquired central positions in these networks, facilitating the expansion of the new movements. In Nunavut, the communities of Mittimatalik, Pangniqtuuq, and Arviat are strategic centres in this process. In Nunavik, Quaqtaq and Salluit play a similar role. These recent developments have coincided with the rapid socio-economic development of the North, favouring religious movements that view the discovery of new economic resources as tangible signs of God's recognition of the Inuit. With increasingly intense discussions in the North about environmental pollution and sustainable development, new strategies are required. The warming of the Arctic climate is providing easier access to new resources but also creating new problems for local residents.

Global warming is not a new phenomenon since the climate is continually prone to change. Inuit have always been able to adapt to climate change. They are, however, affected by the heated discussions outside the Arctic on global warming, especially when southern people assume that the cause is mainly human interference. Although the discussions sometimes take on apocalyptic overtones, they also may have some positive connotations. They raise the expectation that the Arctic will become more accessible to southerners and that the Northwest Passage will soon be open to international sea traffic. Inuit are no longer viewed as a unique people in a harsh land. These "Arctic wastes," as the missionary Edmund James Peck often called them in the late 19th century (Laugrand et al. 2006), are to become a land where all people can live, where diamonds, oil, and other resources can be harvested, and where Inuit should be drawn more and more into the modern global community.

We previously explored the rapid growth of Evangelical movements, particularly Canada Awakening Ministries (CAM), and showed how the latter integrates modern ideologies with Inuit traditions from a Christian perspective (Laugrand and Oosten 2007a). In this paper, we continue our study of CAM and its Healing the Land team among the Inuit with a focus on environmental issues. Our main data source is the CAM web site and its blogs. We will first examine the CAM strategy to create effective networks of Indigenous leaders. Then we will explore the development of CAM rituals that aim to reconnect people to God and to the land. Finally we will discuss how CAM manages to connect their "healing the land" practices to hunting and environmental issues and support Inuit in their struggle against radical environmentalists who view global warming as the most important threat to future generations.

Canada Awakening Ministries

Joining the two ends of the earth

Canada Awakening Ministries was founded in 1978 by Rev. Roger Armbruster and is based in Niverville, Manitoba. It soon began supporting a few churches in the North, organising many activities such as Bible conferences. Although a newcomer to the area, CAM became a dominant actor in the development of Evangelical movements and their international networks. CAM has close associations with Fusion Ministries, led by Rhonda Hughey, The Sentinel Group, led by George Otis Jr., The Healing the Land Ministry, founded by Rev. Vuniani Nakauyaca, and various other ministries. Armbruster (pers. comm. 2010) emphasises that they “are not people with a Western or a European mindset.”

According to the CAM home page, connecting Indigenous peoples from all over the world is a necessary step in a process of conversion and transformation. In Fiji, as in Nunavut, the population is largely Indigenous and scattered across a wide area in many small communities. At stake in both areas is the building of an Indigenous Christian Church. In 2003 the Nunavut leader Tagak Curley made a trip to Fiji, and in September 2004, he received the “torch of revival” from L. Qarase, the Methodist Prime Minister of Fiji.¹ Tagak Curley offered him the flag of Nunavut and during the following years a collaborative project took shape to bring together Indigenous peoples from the North and the South, the two diametrically opposed regions of the globe representing the ends of the earth. In 2003, Otis from the Sentinel Group, Armbruster from CAM, Curley from Nunavut, and various other dignitaries were invited to a meeting in Fiji (Laugrand and Oosten 2009: 355). A trip by Fijians and Inuit to Israel was planned in 2006 (*ibid.*). It was decided that in July 2006 the Fijian Healing the Land team would travel to Nunavut to “heal the land.” The Healing the Land team has since made several trips to Nunavut.

Promoting local leaders

CAM assigns a special responsibility to Indigenous people. Armbruster considers them to be “gatekeepers,” a term often used but never fully explained in his blog on the CAM web site. Although it can mean Indigenous people as a general category, it usually refers to local leaders, religious or political, who are thought to represent the Indigenous people. It evokes other terms such as “watchmen” (Watchmen 2009) and “promise keepers” (Promise Keepers 2009) that identify special groups of people committed to religious causes and/or intending to become religious leaders, as these categories easily overlap. Thus, Inuit religious leaders Jimmy Arreak and Billy Arnaquq work not only with the CAM ministries, but also with the Promise Keepers and are on the Watchmen’s council. Central to the dynamics of these Evangelical

¹ In Fiji the Evangelical movement has been strongly represented in the political establishment (e.g., Newland 2007).

movements is this notion: by belonging to a special category of individuals, such religious leaders can represent their own people. On the National Aboriginal Day of June 21, 2006, 24 of Canada's Indigenous Evangelical leaders signed the *Covenant of the First Peoples of Canada* in Ottawa, pledging to work together. Article 2 of the covenant states:

The First Peoples of Canada, as a healed, restored and released people, hereby affirm to co-exist and co-labour as partners in transformation with one another and with the Church in Canada, nations and governments. We will walk together in peace, prosperity and freedom. We commit to the restoration, advancement and promotion of the moral and spiritual and political integrity of our society, and the release for all from a negative past. We declare healing for our land and revival in Canada; and Canada will be a banner of healing for all nations worldwide (GNI 2006).

Thus, CAM mainly focuses on local leaders and local communities. The local gatekeepers have not only spiritual authority, but also legal authority: "They have the authority to repent of those things that have happened in that part of the earth where God has called them to live, and to bring a cleansing of those defilements, and then a welcoming of the Holy Spirit to find a Resting Place in their part of the earth" (Armbruster 2008c). Armbruster (pers. comm. 2010) views the healing the land "as a spiritual process and not as a political one, in the sense that nothing is being imposed whatsoever from the outside." The notion of locality is central to Armbruster's thinking: "It is significant that every move of God always reverts back to what is maintained and mentored at the LOCAL level. A national revival cannot sustain a local revival, because the nation is the extension of the locality" (*ibid.*). Local gatekeepers are thus at the heart of the CAM movement. CAM (2009) considers them to be their true partners in a "non-paternalistic relationship" that emphasises fundamental equality between CAM missionaries and local gatekeepers, all of whom acknowledge God as the Creator and the owner of the land:

The gatekeepers in the communities are simply addressing the issues that have defiled their land, so that the land can be healed and cleansed, and given back to God, with a respect of the original gatekeepers whom God placed in each part of the earth to steward and to manage the land where He has placed them. When the land is blessed, the whole community is blessed, and gains benefit from it, regardless of their political or their religious beliefs (Armbruster, pers. comm. 2010).

Armbruster (2008b) considers Inuit to be a "broken people" and connects them to the Jews: "Both the Inuit and the Jewish people have been a broken people. They have known suffering, rejection, abandonment, exile, and dispossession of land. They share the same longings to be a free people in their own homeland" (*ibid.*). Armbruster (2008a) also uses the analogy between Jews and Inuit when discussing the Mittimatalik (Pond Inlet) Bible Conference:

Just as Israel in Egypt was totally *dependent* on, and controlled by the Egyptians, so the lives of the Inuit had [...] much depended on and been controlled by the federal government prior to 1999.

With the forming of the new government of Nunavut in 1999, and the Inuit being finally released to lead their own *Arctic Bible Conference* by believers from the South in 1998, they went through an *independent* stage, which is analogous to Israel in the wilderness. The people were now freed out of Egypt, but they still had to get the Egyptian or slavery mentality out of them (Armbruster 2008a).

According to Armbruster, the ones who decide the issues of his Healing the Land practices are the local elders, the original inhabitants of the land and the groups who moved in later. He argues that many issues such as relocations, residential schools, and dog killings have left a painful legacy of division and mistrust that has to be dealt with. (Armbruster, pers. comm. 2010)

Healing and reconnecting people

The CAM blog focuses on the healing of people. This healing is described as a process of reconnecting people to God, to each other, and to the land and the environment (CAM 2009). A transition has to be made to a new stage that will organise Inuit into “an army that obeys the voice of the Lord, and walks in unity with other spheres of ministry” (Armbruster 2008a). This transition requires connections to other people, especially youth and elders. Connections with Israel and Fiji are also emphasised (*ibid.*). Thus external and internal relationships should be healed so that a religious army can be formed. The gatekeepers’ key role can be discerned in the importance given them by CAM in the recent activities that took place in Quaqtaq (Nunavik) and Mittimatalik (Nunavut).

Quaqtaq, February 2009

On Friday February 13, 2009 the Aaqitauvik Healing Centre was opened in Quaqtaq. Armbruster (2009b) reported: “The main visionaries behind this project are long-term Quaqtaq residents and community leaders Bobby and Eva Deer.” Eva Deer is a former mayor and school principal, and introduced on the blog as “a congregational pastor.” Her husband Bobby is originally from the Mohawk Nation and plays an important role in the religious life of Quaqtaq. The centre they created “does not belong to any one sphere of the community, or to any one institution or organisation, but is for the whole community” (*ibid.*). Armbruster listed all the dignitaries present at the opening. Besides three executive members of Makivik Corporation, including its president, Pita Aatami, these dignitaries represent leading socio-political institutions in Nunavik:

1. Johnny Adams (chief negotiator with the federal and provincial governments for territorial status for Nunavik)
2. Joseph Annahatak, mayor of Kangirsuk, and representing the mayors of Nunavik
3. Maggie Emudluk (chairperson of the Kativik Regional Government)

4. Alacie Arngak (chairperson of the Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services)
5. Michael Gordon (Economic Development vice president of Makivik)
6. George Berthe (corporate secretary of Makivik, and president of Air Inuit)

The presence of Makivik leaders is interesting. This Inuit organisation is mandated to represent and promote the interests of Nunavik Inuit, to ensure proper implementation of the political, social, and cultural benefits of the *James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement*, and to manage and invest monetary compensations so that the Inuit may become an integral part of the northern economy.

Also present were Vae Eli, director of Island Breeze Canada, and Roger Armbruster, director of Canada Awakening Ministries. Armbruster gave a short speech addressing especially the elders and gatekeepers. He explained “the healing process is foundational to dealing with the economic, social and environmental issues of future generations” and that it is “a real and a tangible hope for many people to see themselves, not as victims of past wrongs, but as a free people who are taking responsibility for their own destiny” (*ibid.*). The Samoan leader Vae Eli Samoa stressed various threats to Indigenous people, performed a *haka* dance, and distributed gifts to all the Inuit leaders (*ibid.*).

The creation of the Aaqqitauvik healing centre was well received by the Quebec provincial government, which provided a \$350,000 grant via Ungaluk Nunavik’s crime prevention program (George 2009: 1). Some journalists were apprehensive, warning people against the involvement of a fundamentalist group. Roger Armbruster responded to journalist Jane George on the *Nunatsiaq News* website, saying that he was “against fundamentalism” and against the damage it had done in the past. He pointed out that Vuniani Naukayaca, the controversial leader from Fiji, “had left the Pentecostal denomination in order to fulfill his calling, and that today his inter-denominational team was including Roman Catholics, Methodists, and Pentecostals” (Armbruster 2009c). Finally, whereas in the past only Fijians were involved in CAM practices, now a Samoan leader is also present.

Mittimatalik, March 2008

The *Arctic Bible Conference* was held during Easter week March 20-27, 2008. Its theme, “Heaven on Earth,” evoked the special location of Mittimatalik (Pond Inlet) on the globe (Armbruster 2008a). When presenting the main participants in the event on his blog, Armbruster specified that James Arreak, the Pastor of the Iqaluit Christian Fellowship, who had played an important role in leading the worship in 1999, had family roots in Pond Inlet. At the 2008 meeting Arreak “challenged the delegates that it is time for the Inuit to enter into their inheritance through faith in the promises of God, to inherit their Promised Land by becoming mature sons and daughters of God, and to see His promised blessings fulfilled in the land that He had given to them and to their ancestors” (*ibid.*). Armbruster specified how the meeting’s participants had been

welcomed by Inuit dignitaries such as Pond Inlet mayor, Abraham Kublu, and Pond Inlet MLA James Arvaluk, and that “[t]he platform was filled with territorial and municipal leaders, including MLA Levi Barnabas from Arctic Bay [...] and other dignitaries. [...] all leaders joined in prayer as one of the Anglican ministers and Moses Kyak led out in prayer [...]” (*ibid.*).

Armbruster recalled the events that had happened in Mittimatalik in 1999 and were the subject of the *Transformations II* video movie produced by the Sentinel group.² On that occasion the music of the sound system could not be turned off (Fieguth 2002) and “the Holy Spirit entered the service” as a “mighty waterfall” sound filling the Anglican church (Armbruster 2008a). Armbruster stressed that God’s presence should become permanent instead of temporary, and described it as a healing process during which distinctions between categories are broken down as gender and age groups all come together (*ibid.*). He pointed out that old cultural elements and practices were now fully integrated into a new religious context. A photo (Figure 1) shows the use of country food described as “the product of the land that God had given to them and to their forefathers from time immemorial” (*ibid.*). The drum was also integrated into this Christian event: “One thing that God is doing is restoring things that are ancient, and this time using them to glorify the God of Heaven. One of these is the Inuit drum. God is releasing ancient sounds, that will bring down ancient strongholds” (Armbruster 2008a). This innovation contrasts with many Anglican traditions that long associated the drum with the devil and evil (e.g., Laugrand and Oosten 2008). By integrating country food and the drum into its celebrations, CAM can better connect to Inuit traditions. Bible conferences, where different people, generations, and leaders meet, have proven to be key occasions to develop networks and reshape old traditions in a Christian context.

Armbruster and his group attach much importance to prayer that allows them to obtain God’s help and recognition. A photo of the vision of an angel (Figure 2) was taken after much prayer on July 24, 2009 by a member of Brian Warren’s Team who joined the Healing the Land team during the “healing the land” process that took place in Pangniqtuuq during that summer. Armbruster comments:

While they were climbing the mountain, nobody noticed an angelic presence hovering just above them, but later after they had returned to the community of Pangnirtung at the base of this mountain, they noticed this evidence of an open heaven, and an angelic presence over the community after much prayer had been made to the God of Heaven (Armbruster 2010)!

² These images were widely broadcast and could even be seen on Youtube. Many Inuit saw them as a visitation of God and a sign of revival.



Figure 1. Inuit and Fijians sharing food (source: Armbruster 2008a).



Figure 2. Angelic presence (source: Armbruster 2010).

Healing the land

“Healing the land” is a key practice intended to reconnect peoples to God and to the land, and to facilitate the transformation of the Inuit. The Healing the Land Ministry was founded by Rev. Vuniani Nakauyaca in 2003, and is based in Nausori on the Fiji Islands (HLM 2009). On the website of Fusion Ministries (2009) it is stated that “the Healing the Land team led by Chief Vuniani (Vuniani Nakauyaca) and his son Save (Savenaca Nakauyaca) began with only 4 people a couple of years ago” but that its size soon increased. Lynda Newland observes in her study of the role of the Assembly of Christian Churches in Fiji in the 2006 elections:

‘Healing the land’ is the core project of the Evangelical Fellowship, recently renamed the Covenant Evangelical Church and a member of the ACCF. Under the project, a team visits the provinces to reconcile chiefs and all the Christian denominations in the villages, and to eradicate social ills. Reverend Kanaimawi, who was acting chairman of the ACCF in 2005, described them as:

“very skilled in healing the land. They go out to the village and get all the villagers, irrespective of what church they are, look at their problems, do a spiritual mapping, map out where the devil has been influential – whether it’s a killing field in one place or it’s where they worshipped demons in the past – and then they cleanse those out. Then the people repent for what they have done and ask God to come in and the whole village just transforms itself” (Newland 2007: 307).

She adds: “Critics have noted that ‘healing the land’ includes exorcising gods of other religions (including Hinduism) from the land, and supporting the political rhetoric of the SDI; a counter to the army’s truth and justice exercise” (*ibid.*).

The Healing the Land team has worked not only in Fiji but also in other places such as Thailand and Canada. Since 2006 the team has made regular visits to the North. In the case of the Inuit, “healing the land” rituals connect to their traditional beliefs and practices (Laugrand and Oosten 2007a). The first rituals practised by the Fijian Healing the Land team in Nunavut often involved dividing the participants into significant groups (based on gender, generations, ethnicity) who apologised to each other for their sins and those of their ancestors, and then reconciled with each other. The practice evokes Inuit traditions where the community divided itself into two different groups (e.g., ducks and ptarmigans) who competed with each other to determine their hunting fortunes. The idea that community transformation also implies redefining connections to the past is not just a new Evangelical practice but also a very old Inuit tradition. Inuit elders have always emphasised that one’s wrongdoings would affect the lives of children and grandchildren, and that the misfortunes of the living are often tied to the deeds of their ancestors and namesakes. Therefore, Inuit can strongly relate to Pentecostal and Evangelical perceptions that contemporary problems are linked to the sins of previous generations. In the next section, we will describe and comment on a number of recent events recorded on the CAM blog.

Clyde River, August 2007

In 2007, Canada Awakening Ministries visited the small community of Kangiqtugaapik (Clyde River), where a cultural centre was soon to open. The community is well-known for its opposition to hunting quotas. The team, composed of Armbruster and his wife, a few Inuit and two Fijians, was welcomed by Peter Pangeak, the mayor of Kangiqtugaapik, Jacob Iqalukjuak, the Minister of the Anglican Church, and the elders who lit a *qulliq* (traditional seal oil lamp) for the occasion (Armbruster 2007). By using a *qulliq* and later a drum, they marked the importance of cultural connections to ancestors and traditional culture.

On Sunday August 19, 2007, the group walked to the community's original site, before its relocation. The team visited the old Hudson's Bay Company trading post and stopped at the centre. There, all the participants sang a hymn in Inuktitut, praying to God for the return of the game. An elder took the floor and identified some of "the iniquities and generational sins on this site that had brought defilement to the land, including witchcraft, idolatry, the shedding of innocent blood, and sexual sin" (*ibid.*). On behalf of the whole community the mayor led a prayer of repentance, confessing the sins of his community. Then a collective reconciliation took place. Members of the Fijian Healing the Land team knelt on the ground and all participants embraced each other. Leaders and guests were present, such as Loie Mike the Anglican pastor of Pangnirtung, Benjamin Arreak the Anglican Bishop, Gela Pitsiulak of the *Inuit Circumpolar Conference*, a few Inuit from Rankin Inlet, and even some people from Manitoba.

The group returned to the community and visited key places such as the school, the daycare centre, and the hamlet office where the Healing the Land team met the five counsellors and about 20 local families. The ceremony ended with a cleansing of the land ritual. For that occasion, each authority was represented by a participant who brought a bit of soil from his/her place of origin, and poured it into a huge white pot in front of the whole community assembled for the occasion. The five most important leaders identified the five most common sins of the past, and the soil was mixed with oil and salt. The mixture was blessed and while songs and prayers were performed, more than 60 people applied the mixture to the land in different places within the community to purify and regenerate it entirely. The next morning, the mayor showed a new document in public, i.e., a new covenant, declaring that Jesus was now the "real master" of Kangiqtugaapik. On the radio, other Inuit leaders, such as James Arreak, MLA of Kangiqtugaapik, and his predecessor David Iqaqrialu, declared that the community had now entered a new era (*ibid.*).

Compared to the rituals described in our 2007 paper, the distribution of soil is an innovation that emphasises the importance of one's place of origin. It also evokes a tradition associated with the Inuit winterfeasts of the past when people had to mention their place of origin and season of birth. An important feature was the participation of elders. In contrast to earlier healings by the Fijian Healing the Land team, no monument was erected to objectify the transformation of the land.

Arctic Bay, August 2008

A healing of the land was performed in Arctic Bay between August 1 and 7, 2008, “to deal with some of the root issues that have left a hurtful legacy, and to repent of the sins of our forefathers, both before and after the coming of European immigrants to this High Arctic region” (Armbruster 2008d). On his blog Armbruster (2008d) pointed to the replacement of Inuit place names with Western ones. Thus *King George V Mountain* replaced the older name of *Qulliq*. On Sunday August 3, 2008, a ceremony was held on the land at one of “the original settlements where the remnants of original sod houses still remain, some two miles from present-day Arctic Bay” (*ibid.*). Various photos on the blog show the participation of elders. Below a photo, Armbruster wrote:

Here Tommy Tatatuapik, the representative of the Elders Committee for the community of Arctic Bay, is kneeling down and identifying with his own sins, and the sins of his forefathers, that have brought a defilement and a generational curse on to the land—sins that included idolatry, witchcraft, shamanism, child sacrifice and the shedding of innocent blood (*ibid.*).

As in earlier Healing the Land rituals, “reconciliation” took place when people started to embrace each other. Leaders, gatekeepers, and elders cooperated at the central moment of the ritual. A series of photos shows an abundance of vegetation and animals, thus demonstrating the effects of the prayer to God. As in previous rituals of this type, the one in Arctic Bay also involved a communion and the erection of a stone memorial for coming generations.

At the end of the ritual, Mayor Andrew Taqtu “shared that the *Hamlet Council of Arctic Bay* would be passing an official motion in their next council meeting to mark this day as a turning point in the community, a day when they had repented of the sins of their forefathers, and turned with all of their hearts to recognise the supremacy of the living God in the community of Arctic Bay” (*ibid.*). This action may have reflected Armbruster’s concern about the legal status of the ritual procedures. He did not refer to any role by the Fijian Healing the Land team in the first section of the ritual, but indicated that one of its members had joined a group of participants who climbed to the top of King George V Mountain. Although the mountain’s name was not changed, Armbruster remarked that:

After the climb, and looking back on the mountain, nobody is here suggesting that the Canadian government has officially changed the name of this mountain, but in the spirit realm, and in the eyes of the local elders and gatekeepers of Arctic Bay, [...] this mountain is now symbolic of a much higher authority than that of King George V. It speaks to them of Jesus, “the **Light** of the world” (John 8:12) which the “**qulliq**” foreshadowed (*ibid.*, emphasis in the original).

More photos illustrate the final sequence: the “reconciliation between family members, between genders (husband and wife), and between generations (parents and children).” For the first time, not only the Anglican Church was involved but also the Roman Catholic Church, and leaders from all three denominations—Anglican, Roman

Catholic, and Full Gospel—repented to one another for past divisions. Then elders and youths repented to each other, each group standing on one side of the auditorium: “The older generation repented for not being a good example to the next generation, and for not releasing them to go further in their generation like a bow releases an arrow.” Armbruster (*ibid.*) wrote: “The youth repented for not honouring the older generation, including their elders and their parents, and for an independent spirit that had cut them off from their family roots and their family’s inheritance.”

Armbruster described many dances performed on the occasion by Inuit as well as by Fijians doing “one of their redeemed cultural and spiritual warfare dances in which the Inuit youth got fully involved, with the full blessing and even participation of their elders” (*ibid.*). He saw dancing as a way to “re-connect with something ancient, something that goes back many generations, to the promises that God gave to their forefathers to give them a land that they and their children could inherit” (*ibid.*). The involvement of Inuit elders did not yet come to the fore in the first CAM practices with the Fijian Healing the Land team in 2006, but it clearly developed into an important part of the CAM strategy in 2007 and 2008 and it worked well in Arctic Bay. Armbruster explained:

As long as the elders who knew of detestable practices that were done secretly and under the cover of darkness, and kept quiet and silent about it, Arctic Bay remained in spiritual darkness. And unless and until those things are brought to the light, they only worsen in each generation until a community becomes desperate for healing. Today, however, there is the dawning of a new day as the elders and people of Arctic Bay are opening up their hearts, and bringing the secret works of darkness into the light so that the glory of God can rise upon them brighter and brighter (Isaiah 60:1; Proverbs 4:18). The things hidden from the past for many generations are being disclosed and revealed so that they can be forgiven, cleansed and healed (*ibid.*)!

Disclosure is a very important notion in Inuit traditions and was at the core of shamanism. Shamans were supposed to see transgressions and wrongdoings and make people disclose their wrongdoings. This notion is also essential to the Evangelical perspective and helps to explain why shamans and Evangelical practices evoke each other for so many elders. In other cases, Armbruster carefully transforms old notions into new concepts. The Evangelicals evoke the notion of light, which is so essential in shamanism, as a symbol of God. The Northern Lights are no longer connected to the Inuit deceased but viewed as “a symbol of the light piercing the darkness that can offer hope to the rest of Canada.” In an interview published on Youtube and recorded in 2009, Armbruster stressed the necessity of retaining some parts of Inuit traditions:

I stated that “whether it is with the church which brought in a denominationalized Christianity, or with traditional Inuit religion, there are things in all cultures that are good, and some things that are not good. There are things that are *precious*, and things that are *worthless* in both traditional Inuit culture, and in the traditional church.”

I added that “in the healing the land process, we seek to separate the *precious* (generational blessings) from the *worthless* (generational curses) in all cultures and faiths, including the

white man's culture, and that we seek to break generational curses and to strengthen generational blessings so that the present generation of young people can be free from the curses that have brought fear and darkness into the culture, and walk in greater light and freedom in the future" (Armbruster 2009d).

Mittimatalik, December 2008

"Healing the land" is expected to result in an abundance of game. In January 2009, Armbruster reported on his blog a visit by the Healing the Land team to the community of Mittimatalik.

[...] the leaders and elders of Pond Inlet called those darkest days of the year—December 13-17, 2008—to be a time of coming into the light of God's Presence, and to praise Him for the bountiful harvest on the land and sea since the *Healing the Land* process took place there during the previous July. In addition to having fish larger in size and quantity this Fall, and ptarmigan in unprecedented numbers, in mid-November the Canadian government gave the Inuit permission to harvest some 629 narwhals who had become trapped by the ice near Pond Inlet, producing "*maktaaq for everyone!*" (Armbruster 2009a).

Indeed, during the early fall of 2008 the winter freeze-up trapped about 629 narwhals (Anonymous 2008a). Normally, narwhals would have migrated to their wintering area in Baffin Bay but for unknown reasons they became trapped and doomed to starve or drown when their last breathing holes would disappear. With the authorisation of the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO), the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board, and local elders, the Mittimatalik Hunters and Trappers Organization (HTO) spent two weeks killing the narwhals, and pulling them out of the water to harvest the meat. This massive catch gave the hunters an occasion to teach the younger generations how to kill and harvest whales and it soon became the largest bounty in decades.

Although the hunt did not endanger the estimated 20,000 to 21,000 narwhals of the Eclipse Sound area (*ibid.*), the successful catch sparked a bitter debate between Inuit leaders and an environmentalist group, the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society (SSCS), that called on the government to send an icebreaker to save the narwhals (Anonymous 2008b). Its leader Paul Watson called the killing a "war crime" that could have been prevented. Subsequently, two federal ministers demanded that Paul Watson resign as leader of the SSCS (*ibid.*). On the SSCS web site, Watson (2008a) described the killings as a "bloody massacre" where "Inuit killers roared and laughed barbarously as they inflicted torturous death upon these gentle creatures." Terry Audla, the Executive Director of the Qikiqtani Inuit Association, responded by pointing to Watson's ignorance of Inuit culture. Publishing Audla's email on the SSCS web site, Watson answered:

Don't give me that mealy mouthed tripe about respect. What the men with the rifles did to those intelligent and gentle sentient creatures was NOT respect by any stretch of the imagination. [...]—it was a savage display of human arrogance. The Canadian government could have broken those whales out of there (Watson 2008b).

Watson's comments are extreme and show complete disregard for traditional Inuit values. In a hunting society, a catch is a cause for enjoyment and the hunter will express his joy as a token of respect to the animal he kills. Watson is not interested in Inuit values, and he even challenges the very existence of their culture by implying that the Inuit, by adopting modernity, have forgone their right to be different from other people. This position contrasts sharply with the Evangelical one, which shows a much better understanding of Inuit views and values. On his blog Armbruster related the Inuit reaction to this exceptional harvest (their normal harvesting quota usually ranging between 70 and 130):

On Saturday, December 13, 2008, the community of Pond Inlet gathered together to celebrate the narwhal harvest at a special community feast. The entire community was rejoicing as they gave thanks to God, the Creator and Sustainer of every people group and nation. [...] At the community feast on Sat., Dec.13, Brian Koonoo, vice-chair of the Mittimatalik Hunters' and Trappers' Organization [...] shared, "Since the beginning of the narwhal harvest from Nov. 19th to Dec. 2nd, the health centre did not receive any calls at night or after mid-night. Furthermore, the RCMP did not receive any complaints, and no one spent a night at the cell. [...] Residents of Pond Inlet are more joyful [...]. They are now socialising and supporting each other more without any obstruction and breaching any laws. From the narwhals, we have seen that we can have a better life. Thank you God!" (Armbruster 2009a).

Armbruster accused the environmentalists of being "in a cursing mode" and defended the Inuit of the community, who made good use of a "humane" harvest. Like the Inuit themselves, Armbruster highlighted God's role and immediately contrasted the two conflicting views, the two religions:

One of the contradictions within the religion of environmentalism that sees nature as sacred and divine, and as having more value than human life, is that Mother Nature is venerated as sacred and supreme on the one hand. [...] Which raises the question, "Is Nature the same as the Creator, who provides for people in every part of the earth, or is it part of the Creation?" (*ibid.*).

He quoted an Inuk from Mittimatalik:

The people of Pond Inlet are doing everything they can to help out with the harvesting of the whales so that nothing goes to waste. Inuit have great respect for the animals that they hunt...

We thank the Creator for giving us the animals as we thank Him every time we harvest something... We hope you learn that Inuit respect the animals, and nothing will go to waste. **We are so thankful to our Creator for giving us all the meat we can use,** and thank you for the people who supported us!!! (*ibid.*, emphasis in the original).

A special religious service took place at the Anglican church and Armbruster commented on a photograph: "the entire Hunters' and Trappers' Organization Committee knelt down to give thanks to God. Some of these people had not been that interested in spiritual things before this, but they were overwhelmed by the bountiful

provision of the Creator.” Jayko Alooloo, the chairman of the Hunters’ and Trappers’ Organization even “felt the presence of God for the first time in his life’ and ‘He could even smell the sweet fragrance of His presence, and it was awesome” (*ibid.*). Armbruster connected the miraculous whale hunt to the healing of the land in collaboration with the Fiji Healing of the Land team in July 2008. It should be noted that such whale catches were not new for North Baffin Inuit. A similar one had occurred in 1926 when about 600 narwhals had been trapped in Admiralty Inlet (Anonymous 2008a).

Armbruster reported that a member of the Fiji team even returned to Mittimatalik in December “to celebrate with the community for the many ways in which the community had been blessed since July, and had come together in greater unity and peace.” He added, “[t]he youth of Pond Inlet are now rising up with the blessing of the elders in connection with the Indigenous youth of Fiji to see their ancestral lands healed, and to see a better future based on everything that is good in their ancestral traditions, and breaking only the generational curses” (*ibid.*). He emphasised that Inuit had always taken care of the game so that they would be able to survive. He contrasted the environmentalist cosmology with the biblical one by stating: “environmentalists do not see the animals as a provision from God at all, but rather see the animals as either equal or greater in value than humans. Humans then tend to be controlled by nature rather than to steward and manage nature wisely” (*ibid.*). According to Armbruster:

[the environmentalists] need to pressure and control governments to force heavy-handed measures under the guise of science based on limited observation which often conflicts with the traditional knowledge of the original peoples who have lived on the land from time immemorial, and who have the longest memory of the cycles of nature (*ibid.*).

Armbruster referred to Genesis 9:3 “Every living thing that lives shall be food for you. I have given you all things, even as the green herb” as a foundation of biblical environmentalism that drastically contrasts with the “naturalism” of environmentalists:

The true “healing the land” message is of the opposite spirit from environmental groups which generate strife, debates, and perennial conflicts [...]. True healing begins in the soul of humans, reconciling them to God and to one another, and then as the various spheres of the community come together in unity and peace, the soil and the sea are blessed with abundance.

The land and sea then co-operate with humans, and the earth yields her increase to support the inhabitants who live there. When the land is healed, it is God, not the government, who becomes the primary source of provision and sustenance for the people who are earthkeepers (*ibid.*).

At the end of his blog Armbruster contrasted the biblical “Healing of the Land (HTL)” with “environmentalism as a religion (EAR).” In a scheme of oppositions, he associated EAR with the influence of the state and the objectification of Nature, while HTL advocates individual responsibility focusing on a personal God (*ibid.*).

Conclusion

In this paper we have examined some of the more recent developments of Canada Awakening Ministries (CAM) through the blog of its founder Roger Armbruster. CAM has succeeded remarkably well in connecting to Inuit traditions. Whereas the established churches had viewed drum dancing with great suspicion and distrust, CAM has shown little fear of this tradition, and is confident that it can be integrated in a Christian perspective. CAM has clearly realised the importance of winning over the elders, and in the last two years much more attention has been paid to them by giving them a prominent place in ritual practices. CAM advocates a non-paternalistic approach and focuses on development of Indigenous networks. It respects local political and religious authorities by trying to integrate them as “gatekeepers” endowed with the authority to effect the transformations envisioned by CAM.

The leader of the movement, Roger Armbruster, tries to do justice to Indigenous traditions without compromising his own Christian convictions. In discussing the controversial narwhal harvest near Mittimatalik in 2008, he took a strong stand against the environmentalists. He has argued that the biblical perspective of “Healing of the Land” is much closer to Inuit ideas and values about the environment than the modern ideology of groups such as the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society. This position will greatly appeal to Inuit who feel their very existence is threatened by outsiders who wish to control and curtail their hunting. Thus CAM has become a natural ally for the Inuit in a struggle of life and death to preserve their lifestyle and culture. Armbruster does his best to involve leading members of the local churches, thus integrating all denominations. In preparing the healing of the land slated for August 2010 in Iqaluit, he invited all the religious leaders to a preparatory meeting:

We met that night in the home of Ron and Veronica Dewar [...], along with Lucy Netser (the **Anglican minister** in Iqaluit), Sammi (a highly respected Inuit elder), Father Daniel Perreault (the **Roman Catholic** minister for both Iqaluit and Pond Inlet), Scott Manly (Seventh Day Adventist), and yours truly (Armbruster 2009d, emphasis in the original).

With these recent developments and this ability to connect to Aboriginal cultures and integrate their beliefs and practices, the Evangelicals will probably make more progress among the Inuit of Northern Canada. It will be interesting to see what position such religious movements will take on the exploitation of other natural resources such as gas, oil, and diamonds. Such exploitation is not modelled on Inuit traditions and can easily conflict with preservation of the land and the game. Heated debates are already developing. Inuit residents of northern communities may soon have to decide whether they should give priority to mining or to hunting. In the past, the first Anglican missionaries on Blacklead Island often tried to protect the Inuit against the influence of the whalers and exploitation by outsiders. What choices will the Evangelical movements make? For the moment they are focusing on a local level by supporting local leaders, and on a global level by developing a strong international Indigenous network.

On a theoretical level, many sociologists, historians, and philosophers have explored the connection between religion and nature. Secular Western societies acknowledge no transcendent authority other than their own fundamental values, such as freedom and equality. Such values are to be enforced upon any society that does not acknowledge them. In modern Western discourse, nature and the environment also tend to become transcendental values themselves (see Introduction in Laugrand and Oosten 2007b). In a recent paper, Latour (2009) notes the success of what he calls ecotheology, pointing to the choice that societies are now facing everywhere: “To modernize or to ecologize? that is the question.” Latour questions this tendency to ecologise and connects it not only to a new science but also to a new religion:

What is not clear, however, is what ecologizing will mean exactly. The range of attitudes, prescriptions, warnings, restrictions, summons, sermons, and threats that go with ecology seem to be strangely out of sync with the magnitude of the changes expected from all of us, the demands that appear to impinge on each and every detail of our material existence. It is as if the rather apocalyptic injunction ‘your entire way of life must be modified or else you will disappear as a civilization’ has overwhelmed the narrow set of passions and calculations that go under the name of ‘ecological consciousness.’ [...] In addition [...] there is something deeply troubling in many ecological demands suddenly to restrict ourselves and to try to leave no more footprints on a planet we have nevertheless already modified [...]. It appears totally implausible to ask the heirs of the emancipatory tradition to convert suddenly to an attitude of abstinence, caution, and asceticism—especially when billions of other people still aspire to a minimum of decent existence and comfort (Latour 2009: 462).

It appears even more implausible to hunting societies such as the Inuit, who witnessed how Western whaling and fur trade companies made their fortunes in the North and now find themselves facing all kinds of Western moral boycotts on hunting. The biblical environmentalism preached by Evangelical groups offers an alternative to the radical ecology that has become so popular in global warming discourse. Inuit feel threatened by its environmental pessimism and its ethical radicalism that subordinates the interests of hunters to those of their prey. Even though Evangelical groups are probably more modern than they realise, they remain embedded in a naturalist cosmology (Descola 2005) in which animals exist for human use. When Evangelical groups preach biblical environmentalism against radical ecology, they may be closer to their demonised opponents and further from Inuit traditions than they realise. In Inuit cosmology and hunting traditions a deep respect for animals has always been closely connected to their association with non-human beings and agents, and the land and its animals have retained a transcendent nature as the source of all life.

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